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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001641

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STATE FOR SCA AND NEA, USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: PREL PTER CE IR IS

SUBJECT: ISRAELI AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES ISRAELI RELATIONS
WITH SRI LANKA AND MALDIVES

REF: COLOMBO 1639

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) In an introductory meeting on December 7, Israel's new Ambassador to Sri Lanka Mark Sofer (who is resident in New Delhi) told Ambassador that after presenting his credentials to President Rajapaksa and several days of consultations in Colombo he had noted considerable pessimism about the future of peace in Sri Lanka, dismay among Western embassies over continued human rights violations, and the government's "hyper-reaction" to security concerns.

Ambassador responded that the USG also was concerned about the GSL's lack of clear strategy on peace, its continued poor human rights record and its intention to keep up military pressure on the LTTE with attendant consequences for human rights and possibly more adverse humanitarian developments. As a result the USG had suspended indefinitely its efforts to conclude a Millennium Challenge Corporation compact with Sri Lanka, and reduced the scope of military assistance and training.

¶2. (C) Sofer indicated that he had expressed great concern about President Rajapaksa's visit to Tehran and the virulent anti-Zionist statements that had been reported in the Iranian press during the visit. He said the GSL had disassociated itself from such statements and claimed credit for removing all references in the final joint communiqu to the "Zionist entity." Ambassador confirmed that no inflammatory rhetoric had been published in Sri Lanka, but shared with Sofer that the Embassy had asked the GSL before the visit how it could be paying a high level visit to the country considered by the U.S. and many others to be the leading state sponsor of terrorism when Sri Lanka's primary foreign policy objective is to attract international support for its fight against terrorism. The answer clearly was that promises of significant Iranian credits helped drive the visit (reftel). Sofer responded that based on his consultations with the Ambassador and others, Sri Lanka's unfriendly voting record in the UN, and its growing relations with Iran, he would recommend that Israel provide only non-lethal military assistance and modest economic assistance to bring Israel into line with what the U.S. is doing.

¶3. (C) Ambassador briefed Sofer on his earlier efforts to encourage then-Foreign Minister Ahmed Shaheed of the Maldives to meet quietly with former Israeli Ambassador Danieli either in New Delhi or another third country. Since a new Foreign Minister, Abdullah Shahid, had taken office, should the U.S. continue to suggest quietly that the Maldives enter into a

dialogue with Israel? Sofer thanked the Ambassador for these efforts and said he would welcome the opportunity to meet FM Shahid at a time and place of Shahid's choosing. Ambassador undertook to raise this confidentially during his next visit.

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